

THE ROUND TABLE

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There came a time when King Arthur decided he should marry. He asked his good friend Merlin the Enchanter for his advice.

Merlin agreed it was time for Arthur to marry, saying a man in his ^{position} should have a wife, and the kingdom needed a queen. He asked King Arthur ^{whether} there was any lady that he loved. Arthur told him that he loved the Lady Guinevere, daughter of King Leodegrance of Camelard, who owned the Round Table. The table was given to him by Uther Pendragon, King Arthur's father. ←



"Guinevere is the most kind and beautiful lady in the world," said Arthur. He asked Merlin to go to King Leodegrance and tell him of his wish to marry Guinevere.

King Leodegrance was delighted. "This is the best news I have heard in ages," he said. "I am proud that ^{as} such a noble and brave king as King Arthur wishes to marry my daughter. I will send him a gift to show him ^{how} pleased I am — the great Round Table given to me by his father, Uther, which has space enough for one hundred and fifty knights."



And so Merlin returned to King Arthur's castle at Camelot with Guinevere, the Round Table, and one hundred knights sent by Leodegrance to serve Arthur and take their place at the Round Table.



King Arthur was overjoyed and made arrangements for the wedding to take place as soon as possible. He also asked Merlin to choose fifty worthy knights to fill the remaining seats at the Round Table. In a short time, Merlin had gathered forty-six of the bravest and most noble knights in the kingdom at King Arthur's court.

The wedding day soon arrived, and the Archbishop of Canterbury went to Camelot to marry King Arthur and Lady Guinevere at St Stephen's Church. All the people of the kingdom were invited to join the celebration and, at the end of the solemn service, they cheered as the bells rang out over Camelot.



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After the wedding service, Arthur asked the archbishop to join them at court and bless each seat at the Round Table. Each knight in turn took a seat as it was blessed, until all the places were filled except for four.

Arthur and Guinevere took their places at the table and Merlin asked the knights to stand and bow to their king and queen. As the knights did so, gold letters mysteriously appeared on each chair, spelling the name of the knight who sat there. The knights gasped in amazement when they saw what had happened.





"Let me explain the wonders of the Round Table," said Merlin. "At this table all men are equal — no one sits at the head or the foot. When a knight is killed in battle, a new knight will take his place, and his name will also be written on his chair. The names of all the knights who sit at King Arthur's table will live on forever."

"But what about the empty seats?" asked King Arthur.

"One place is for the Black Knight," said Merlin. "You will soon hear tales of him and will face him in combat before he takes his place at this table. Two more are for brave knights who have yet to arrive, and the one left is the Perilous Seat. That seat must not be taken by any man except for the one for whom it is intended — and he is the best knight of them all."

Merlin looked so solemn, that no one, not even King Arthur, dared to ask who the best knight was. ←



Then King Arthur spoke to his knights as they sat at the table. "You must promise never to act unfairly and always to show mercy to those who ask for it. You must behave well towards women, and not fight without good reason or to gain possessions. If you break your promise, you will lose your place at the Round Table."

The knights all made this promise and agreed to renew it every year at the same time. ←



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